



## UNVEILING THE MYSTERIES OF HUMAN MIND IN SHASHIDESHPANDE'S COME UP AND BE DEAD

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### ABSTRACT

The Padmashri awardee Shashi Deshpande is a popular name in the arena of Indian English Literature. She has penned around eleven novels and *That Long Silence* has won her Sahitya Academy Award. Shashi Deshpande's *Come Up and Be Dead* is a suspense thriller which revolves round the serial murders in the school campus. It stands apart from the rest of her feministic novels. Shashi Deshpande is very successful in her attempt as a thriller novelist as the novel contains all the core of thriller and evokes suspense, excitement, curiosity and high tension. At first it is the death of Mridula Dutta of 10th which wasn't a natural death but a suicide. Everybody in the school was pretty sure that the reason was her being pregnant. The head mistress of the old, exclusive girl's school was disturbed as it was causing a bad reputation. The reason for all the murders is interrelated and the truth behind it is trading school girls in sex racket and the chief of it turns out to be the head of the School Varma. Child sexual abuse is a contemporary social issue and Deshpande not only mirrors it in this novel but educates the reader. The trafficking of children involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of children for the purpose of exploitation. Commercial sexual exploitation of children can take many forms, including forcing a child into prostitution.

**KEYWORDS:** Detective novel, Mysteries, human mind, sex racket.

The Padmashri awardee Shashi Deshpande is a popular name in the arena of Indian English Literature. She has penned around eleven novels and *That Long Silence* has won her Sahitya Academy Award. Shashi Deshpande's *Come Up and Be Dead* is a suspense thriller which revolves round the serial murders in the school campus. It stands apart from the rest of her feministic novels. Shashi Deshpande is very successful in her attempt as a thriller novelist as the novel contains all the core of thriller and evokes suspense, excitement, curiosity and high tension. At first it is the death of Mridula Dutta of 10<sup>th</sup> which wasn't a natural death but a suicide. Everybody in the school was pretty sure that the reason was her being pregnant. The head mistress of the old, exclusive girl's school was disturbed as it was causing a bad reputation. The reason for all the murders is interrelated and the truth behind it is trading school girls in sex racket and the chief of it turns out to be the head of the School Varma. Child sexual abuse is a contemporary social issue and Deshpande not only mirrors it in this novel but educates the reader. The trafficking of children involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of children for the purpose of exploitation. Commercial sexual exploitation of children can take many forms, including forcing a child into prostitution.

The present paper tries to study the mysteries of human mind in the detective novel *Come Up and Be Dead*. At the outset though the novel is about murder mystery Shashi Deshpande as always throws light on the human relationships and exposes their intrinsic mind. There is Kshma and her cousin Devayani, Sonali and her mother Jyoti, Mrudula and her gynecologist mother Sitha, Kshma and her brother Pratap, Doctor Girish and his wife. The parent children relationship is also realistically portrayed by the novelist. The importance of parent children relationship and its significant role in the growth of individual is clearly depicted.

The gossip in the school was true as it is revealed by one of Mridula's friend Sonali who spoke to H.M. regarding her missed periods. Sonali being daughter of her staff Mrs. Raman the H.M. had given mental courage by saying that gossips would die soon. H.M. Kshma's cousin was Devayani who was paid for looking after her house. Kshma's brother Pratap had known the girl Mridula. The main protagonist is Devayani who has investigative mind and good observation. There was nothing in common between the cousins Kshma and Devi nor brother and sister Pratap and Kshma. Kshma was very much elated of her achievement as a H.M. of the elegant school. There was an air of superiority in her. Pratap was a failure and he could not take the burden of it and had lost his senses. He had come and stayed with his sister only after his accident and has psychological breakdown. Devayani was 27 and unmarried. Her sister Sumi though with epilepsy is settled with a marriage and children. Devayani had looked after her parents and her father's death brought her to Kshma's home and she was thrilled of earning by herself.

Sona as a young child was disturbed by Mridula's death and was wondering if she really wanted to die. "Do you think she got scared when she knew she was going to die? When you're dead there's nothing left. You can't do anything about anything ever" (35). Sona was very sure that Bunny knew the reason for Mridula's death. Kshma didn't have any sisterly affection towards Pratap. She was angry with him for his state of mind. She had said "was it not enough for him to be a failure, did he also have to become a wreck of a human being as well?" (39). Disturbed by the anonymous letter Mridula's mother visits Kshma suspecting Pratap but she

manages to say "they were just two lonely people with a common interest" (53). With the increasing tittle tattle about Pratap's involvement in Mridula's death, Kshma wants him to leave her home and go for work. She was losing her temper and it was too undetectable when students tried to frighten her. Even they had written on board that Mridula is dead due to HM's brother and both were to be taken out of the school. The grip was getting lost by all the unnecessary turmoil in the school. She was unaware of this kind of actions and the hands behind this triggering. Kshma had an ambition of becoming school teacher and now she was a successful H.M. But for the first time she feared of getting lost of her ambition. She was succumbed to panic. She was determined to send Pratap from her home. "Ofcourse, the school come, the school comes first. Pratap must go" (92).

Dr. Girish invites Devi and Pratap to dinner as an occasion of his birthday. He tries to be friendly with Devi but she can't shed her wall of shy. He had promised to bring his wife and had failed. Though he was upset but had all praises for his wife, Shaheeda, "Poor girl, she's too young for marriage really. Sometimes she just can't cope with things". In fact both were struggling to get adjusted to the family life. He wonders what she had thought about him and hurried to marriage. He is afraid if he is making up to her. He says, "I don't know what she thought it would be marrying a doctor. She must have had an impossibly romantic idea of a medical man" (116). It's very clear from his words that he is struggling very hard to impress his beautiful wife. He is coping with her imagination of good husband and his practical self. When Girish and Devi were talking Pratap had gone missing. Though he had kept them waiting he didn't apologize but he had something to say but Devi had no patience to listen him after dinner. The next day she finds Pratap dead. Initially it looked like a fall from the ladder but she had doubted it as a murder. When she checked his room she finds the reading lamp was on and sensed he had scribbled something but the most unreadable was gone or jana, which was repeated twice or thrice. Devi had the desire to know about it and to find some clue from it she takes to Dr. Girish. Even he failed to find some meaning out of it. Devi had told Girish about his fall and inquired about the autopsy report.

Devi tried to remember everything about the night before his death how he had gone abruptly from the chair as though he had caught someone and had a feeling of victory of finding something. When Devi tells about her suspicion Kshma is reluctant to believe it and is forceful in hiding Devi's suspicions from the inspector. Sona's mother was hurrying herself to leave the school and the place but Sona was against that and had a bad fight. She argues with her mom: Am I a dummy or puppet or something? Have I no mind, no life of my own?" She had hurt her mother by bringing her father in between them and wishes to get help from him. Her mother had not revealed anything about her father. In this desperate mood Jyoti agreed to be Gypsy for the school function as she wanted to prove her daughter wrong in judging that she can't perform it. She was supposed to wear the gypsy costume and depict the future of girls who visit their tent. Jyoti gets killed in the tent. Kshma was not ready to take the blame of this murder on her school. She believed that it was because of her personal life and nothing to do with the school. After this murder ACP arrives and investigation starts. With the help of Devi and Sona he is able to get much information of not only of Mrs. Raman but of Pratap's Murder.

Devi expresses her doubt that there is a link between the murders. Bunny knew about Mridula's death and she had told about this to Mrs. Raman, so she was

killed. Even Pratap was killed for knowing something about Mrudula's death. When the ACP enquired Sharmila he got some clues about her presence at the restaurant "Open Sesame". Sona is upset the way her house was sneaked and checked by someone in a haphazard way. Kshama stuck to her words that Pratap's death was an accident. But Devi adheres to her intuition and tells ACP about the Pratap's scribbling on a paper and its availability with Dr. Girish.

Sharmila hurries to Devi and warns Devi to send Sona away from this place implying her life is in risk. Devi wanted to call the Inspector but slept without calling him but she was restless. When she checked Sona's room she wasn't there and she becomes too worried. At this peak of point the author brings suspicions towards Kshama behind all the mystery. Devi searches the home and not finding Sona gets unnerved and goes out of the house. She hears the screams of Sona and moves towards school building. Sona sobs "Sharmila... he's killed her. She's dead" (200). When Devi comes to Sharmila she finds her alive. Kshama calls the inspector herself. After getting thrown by a piece of paper into her room Sona had gone to meet Sharmila to know about her mother's death. When she reached the building there was no sign of Sharmila. When she saw Sharmila she was able to sense the presence of another man. Sharmila screams Sona to go away. The next thing she knew was Sharmila had hit the ground and Sona escaped from the man screaming. Sharmila regains consciousness and recovers. She tells the truth of being the young man's mistress and he was responsible for Mrudula's pregnancy. Bunny reveals someone from the school was involved in this. With her maid Sapna Devi had gone to a movie and reading the posters she resolved the riddle and guessed what Pratap meant in his paper. He had guessed call girls Mrudula, Sharmila, when she felt like telling this to the Inspector she left the theatre but Dr. Girish who had come with his wife followed her. Devi innocently without noticing the impending danger tells him what she had found. Promising her to take to the ACP he took her to his clinic and not dialing inspectors number he was trying some other number and Devi understands this. He can't let Devi go with all the truth she has known and now Devi was caught in the maze. Dr. Girish justifies his act by saying whatever he did was for his wife. He says, "She's born for all the good things in life. I promised her, I promised myself that she would lack for nothing when she became my wife" (218). When he got a chance to make some many he can't let it go. Gloria had sent Mrudula to him saying lots of money for you from a rich father. Mrudula had spoken about the hotel Sesame and Sanjay who had taken her there and made her to drink and when she was awake she found herself with a stranger man and was sure something had happened to her. Girish was wise enough to learn about it that these men were making money by selling these virgins. Girish went to Sanjay and asked his price to keep quiet. He was taken to the main chief Varma. Though that man had enough money he enjoyed trading girls. He was not for the money, a sadist who was deserted by his young wife. It was a sort of revenge he was taking. Girish says he is not involved directly but it is he who brings Pratap out of the room and gets him murdered as he had seen the girls in the hotel. Even Mrs. Raman was killed for knowing about them. Finally Devi is rescued by the Inspector. Sharmila had readily accepted to be Sanjay's Mistress and saved Sona's life. She didn't have pity for Mrudula who liked her boyfriend. It was she who went behind him and meant this end. After all this Sona continues her study in the same school. The inspector wants his daughter to get admitted to this school only. He is aware of the demands of his daughter and wants to spend time with her. Kshama again continues as a challenging HM to her school.

All the characters in the novel reveal the complications in their relationships and the secretive feelings are narrated by them only.

#### KSHAMA – PRATAP

Kshama never cared about anybody in her life apart from her own being. She was self-centered and very much career oriented lady. She is squashed without any designation and school. She exists for it and noting without it. Among the intellectuals' father and sister, Pratap was an average boy and was always called poor Pratap by his mother. Sixteen years of long gap between Kshama and Pratap but it was not the gap of years that mattered but Kshama was a domineering one and Pratap was easily ignored. She had feared that he would take her place when he was born but her father ignored him. She always hated him because of his gender preference. Even when her father had died he had shaved his head and the sight had outraged as though he only linked with his father. Now his presence was disturbing in her school affairs and was not ready to take it. But Pratap wanted to stay there to discover who forced that little innocent girl to commit suicide. He was very sure that Mrudula was not that sort of girl and there was something he is up to and needs time for that says "I have a feeling it was someone here, in this school, that was behind it. I don't mean only the man who got her pregnant. I think that's only a small part of it. There's something more, much more. Something wrong." Kshama never trusted him and thought he was just playing Sherlock Holmes. But he was really on the right track. When Bunny had stopped coming to the school he had guessed right that "they've scared her away" (110). Even after his death she is not shaken a little bit and is calm and composed as though he is not connected to her life in any way.

#### PRATAP – MRUDALA

Pratap and Mrudula were sailing in the same boat of loneliness. Both shared a love-hate relationship with their parents. Directly their parents were responsible for their unusual behavior. Pratap's father was certain and confident that he was good for nothing. All the time his self-confidence is creaked and is broken and all

his life he was not able to gather his whole shattered self. He had believed, "that the rest of the world had wonderful parents and I was the only unfortunate one" (62). Talking with Mrudula he was forced to change his mind. Mrudula was very lonely with her parents and she hated her mother so much that she wanted to hurt her by doing something wrong. Her busy working parents didn't have any time for her. Her mother being Gynecologist didn't educate her daughter with the basics of life and failed to develop any good rapport with her. It was like if her husband is not taking his daughters responsibility then she will also not commit to take that. She would have at least spent her evenings with her daughter but Mrudula was left to roam around without proper love, care and affection by her parents. Mrudula on her mother had said "I trust you, I have confidence in you, my mummy tells me. It makes me just mad. I feel like going out and doing something that will shake her out of that silly complacency. It's not me, really, she's got confidence in. It's her own competent self. I have brought you up and so you've got to be good, that's her" (62). Mrudula's mother had failed to gain her daughters confidence. Mrudula being a neglected child was forced to spend her time outside and her frustrated mind was hopping for change. As a teenager she longed for love friendship and as a curious adolescent had fantasy for happiness. Mrudula had asked Pratap to marry her after knowing what is growing in her tummy. But Pratap had plainly denied as a small girls joke but when she cried to her heart he had got the seriousness of her words. Pratap was able to perceive that something was really wrong with her. She didn't reveal anything about the culprit, but he was sure about the girl Sharmila's involvement in the Mrudula's Plight.

#### DEVAYANI-PRATAP

Devayani was sensible. She was able to discover Pratap's mood and trusted his words. Even Pratap relied on her and asked her help to find about Sharmila. Mrudula had given some hint about her and he was persistent to find about it. When Bunny, Sona's and Mrudula's friend said that Mrudula had said that she had a boyfriend and it was Pratap Devi was shocked by the thought of Pratap's involvement with it. Though they were cousins and just with a gap of 6 months they were never friendly in childhood days. Their mothers had tried in vain to raise them together in holidays. But now she understands him better than his own sister Kshama. She even takes him to the doctor for his monthly check up and provides evidence of his murder. It's her acquaintance with him makes her to come to the conclusion of the criminals.

#### MRS. RAMAN-SONALI

Sonali wants her space and feels humiliated by her mom's interference. She may be a teacher but more of a mother is seen Mrs. Raman is over protective towards her daughter and is very keen in leaving her job in the school after Mrudula's death. She is worried that her daughter may get spoiled by the girl but Sonali is very rebellious in nature and wants to stay with her father, whom she has never seen once also. There is lack of communication between mother and daughter. Jyoti would have revealed about her unsuccessful marriage. She was just 16 when she was married and that man had only sexual desires for her which was abnormal and insatiable. She wanted to cry as rape but who cares when it is by a husband. Then she became pregnant and got escaped from the man. When the child was born it was entirely her own. She had confessed with her mother and she had laughed, "Men-they're made that way. There's nothing we can do about it. We've got to put up with their demands. And you'll get used to it one day we all do" (142). She had given second chance and went to her husband but his sexual harassment depressed her and she had tried to kill herself. After learning the truth that he was unbearable to her she had applied for divorce. After divorce Jyoti had completed her education and earned a job. With the disapproval of her parents she moved out with her daughter only aspiring for her daughter's better future. All her life she had thought about her daughter and her so called father had remarried and had children without caring for his baby and Sona thinks of him. When Sonali was talking to Bunny and her mother calls her home in an angry voice, she says "you insult me, you humiliate me before my friend. It's not fair. I'm ashamed of you, I'm ashamed" (23). With the posing restrictions of her mother she wants to stay with her father so as to get freed from the clutches of her mom. After her mother's death she shows much maturity at her age and takes care of herself.

#### Sharmila-Mrudula

Sharmila is a dark, slim and self-contained girl of 12<sup>th</sup> who is sexually exploited. She seeds the doubt on Pratap and mirrors him as a guilty of Mrudula's suicide. Her blind love and loyalty in helping her boyfriend arouses pity on her. Sharmila remains uncanny towards Mrudula and allowed her to suffer as though she was destined for it. Her goodness is in putting her life in risk to save Sona's life. Mrudula was ignorant about the evils of the world. Her innocence was trampled. She didn't have any idea. She had confessed with Pratap, "They never told me. They said it was just a bit of fun" (63).

The involvement of the most reputed, respected and responsible persons of the society Varma and Doctor Girish in the sex scandal is very dreadful and shameful. One does it to take revenge and another does it in desire to make money. Shashi Deshpande is criticizing this heinous act and questions the ethics and morality of man. In the Inspectors words, "I believe in the theory of evil. Just simple evil that drives men and women to deeds that seem incomprehensible to others. And yet, the truth is that all of us carry this potential for evil within us. We have to struggle against it all our lives. Some prefer not to struggle, that's all" (234). Thus

by the end of the novel not only the real culprits are detected but even the mysteries of every character is revealed.

**REFERENCES:**

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